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## It's aloha to La Toya on 'Idol'

By Bill Keveney, USA TODAY

*American Idol's* Jasmine Trias is riding a huge wave of Hawaiian support.



Did Hawaii take Simon's comments as a dare?: Jasmine Trias returned after Wednesday's show to be honored by Lt. Gov. Duke Aiona.

By Marco Garcia, Getty Images

Despite predictions of elimination after Tuesday's tearful performance — generally considered the weakest among the four finalists — the Oahu resident finished in the top two, helped by a surge of voting from her home state.

Hawaii's 1.25 million population completed a total of 1.23 million calls in the two-hour voting period after Tuesday's show, a large portion of which were for *Idol*, says Kevin Lavery of Verizon. That's 24,000 more than were recorded in New Jersey, which has seven times the population. Overall, Hawaii logged more calls than all of Verizon's 29 coverage states, except for New York and California, in the post-*Idol* hours.

*Idol* viewers can vote as often as they wish within two hours of the broadcast.

Many viewers were shocked Wednesday when Trias, 17, and fellow high-schooler Diana DeGarmo, 16, drew the most votes, while the competition's most lauded singers, La Toya London, 25, and Fantasia Barrino, 19, finished below. London was eliminated.

"I felt like I could have gone all the way. And how much support I had, I definitely was surprised," London says. "I told Jasmine earlier that day, 'You know how unpredictable it is. So don't worry that it might be you that goes home, because it just might be me.' Then the thought crossed my mind, 'It might just be me today.'"

London's ouster drew boos from the *Idol* studio audience; judge Randy Jackson called the result "a travesty." Many fans protested online and elsewhere, reigniting a recent controversy when London, Barrino and Jennifer Hudson were in the bottom three last month.

"Out of protest, I will never watch again, and I ask the country to stop watching," says music industry veteran Richard Halpern. "To keep someone as flat-out horrible as Jasmine while putting La Toya and Fantasia in the bottom two is an outrage."

Not all the calls in Hawaii were *Idol* votes, of course. And among votes, it's not known how many were for Trias. But Michael Perry, who co-hosts a morning radio show in Honolulu, says "98%" supported Trias. "We get behind people from Hawaii. It's the Aloha spirit," says Perry. The depth of Hawaiian public support "would

not even come close on the mainland."

Though island votes helped Trias, they make up only a small portion of a national total that regularly tops 25 million. Other theories abound about how the vote veered so wildly from the consensus of judges and observers:

- The stealth return of *American Juniors*:** Many *Idol* followers believe children and teens, who are more likely to be passionate and prolific voters, lean toward their own age group, which includes DeGarmo and Trias.

- The reverse Simon.** Some fans appear to be casting votes against the judges, especially caustic Simon Cowell. When Cowell ripped John Stevens, voters kept him. When he praised the 16-year-old, voters let him go. On Tuesday, Cowell told Trias everyone in Hawaii would need five phones to save her.

- The question of racism.** Much the same as when black women Barrino, London and Hudson were the bottom three, some fans wonder whether color is affecting votes. *Idol* producers dispute that notion, as does London, who notes Ruben Studdard's victory last year.

Executive producer Nigel Lythgoe says he expected London to make the final show, but adds that it's hard to be surprised considering recent votes. Lythgoe likens London's dismissal to *Idol*'s first year, when Tamyra Gray, considered one of the two best, was dropped in the same round, drawing howls of protest.

Asked whether this year's *Idol* winner would be the best singer, he says, "This is not a competition for best singer. You vote for your next American Idol. You need a lot of other things. You need charisma, you need warmth. Maybe America felt La Toya had a fantastic voice but she wasn't as warm."

He and others suggest Trias' tears after Tuesday's performance might have gained her votes.

London concedes that she's reserved and that young voters might relate more to her younger competitors. But she isn't analyzing the vote. "I want to move forward," she says. "I know my career is going to do well, because I'm not going to stop."

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